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Longing, Lust and Persuasion: Powerful and Powerfully Sensuous Women in Imerina

Victor Raharijaona and Susan Kus

[Andriana]... firy moa ny fo nao?
 Ny fo tokana tsy misy fiverenana aleo ko fo
 roa fa ny fo roa ama-miera amim-bahoaka... ..
 [Potential heir to the throne]... how many hearts
 do you have?
 A single heart will not permit a “change of
 heart”... .. I prefer two hearts, for two hearts will
 be attentive to the people... ..
 (Loose translation from the *Tantara ny Andriana eto
 Madagascar*, collected by F. Callet, vol. I, 1981,
 pp. 286-288)

- 1 In a volume devoted to the theme of sexuality, it is appropriate to look at desire, longing and sensuality; to how women (and men) in Madagascar’s past have used physical attraction to further personal and political projects, including members of the highest ranks of society. Certainly, when the consummate act of sex with the spouse of the ruling sovereign is confounded with an act of state treason, the assertion that “the private is the political” takes on additional force.
- 2 Sensuality was a trait of the women of Madagascar remarked upon by a number of (male) European sources, according to Berthier (1911:742). These women were allowed to wield their sensuality to seek their pleasure with whom they wished. In the region of Imerina, in the island’s central highlands, such European observations are complemented by and, more importantly, nuanced in the oral tales of earlier times, and in the enduring oral arts of song and recitation. Concerning their bodies and their alliances, women of upper class status held even more agency than those born into lower status. Women of high rank

often exercised the right to not only choose a spouse, but also the right to divorce the spouse when he ceased to please (Berthier 1911:744; Vig 2003:56); unless of course, the spouse was the supreme ruler. Yet even then, pre-nuptial arrangements were not unknown. According to Raombana (1980:205), Rambolamasoandro, a wife of Andrianampoinimerina (who ruled from 1787-1810), and mother of his successor, Radama I, was both of high status and of “licentious disposition.” Had she not benefitted from such an agreement, her life would surely have been taken. For “*wives of the sovereigns to lay with men is death by the Malagasy Law*” (*ibid.*). Lest we forget, there were also instances of women as supreme rulers, in particular, those in the beginning and in the end (*faran’ny lohany*) of the Merina state; those that founded (Rangita and Rafohy) and those that ended (Rasoherina, Ranavalona II and Ranavalona III) the Merina dynasty.

- 3 The power of love and the love of power have often been intertwined in tales and histories that draw commoners into some interest in and, at times, sympathetic alliance with the elite: David and Bathsheba, Romeo and Juliet, Temudgin and Börte, Lancelot and Guinevere, Salim and Anarkali, Tristan and Isolde. That an interweaving of the private and the political is also found in the history of the early Merina state should not be particularly surprising. In fact, the culture hero of the *Tantara ny Andriana*, Andrianampoinimerina (whose name can be translated as the “Noble Who is Desired in the Hearts/Navels of [his subjects] the Merina”), had himself felt desire for a number of his consorts. His longing for Miangaly is still preserved today in folktale and song, and even physically in a newly refurbished tourist stop at the tomb of Miangaly at Ankadimanga, a village lying about 40 kilometers to the east of Antananarivo. Our intent in this essay is to look more closely at the enduring tale of Miangaly and Andrianampoinimerina. This is so as to be able to not only appreciate how this tale was used in state propaganda, but also to appreciate a Malagasy twist on how the political and the private are inextricably bound.

Consorts: gods and mortal

- 4 In the days when mortals and gods consorted on the Big Red Island, women were clever, creative and indomitable, and they left powerful traces of their former presence on the land.
- 5 The quick-witted daughter of Andriamanitra used ruse to bring rice, the food of the gods desired by her mortal husband, to earth for herself and her beloved consort. Forbidden originally by her father to bring rice to earth, she however was allowed to bring chickens with her. While still in the heavens, she fed rice grains to her chickens. Returning to earth, she then slaughtered the chickens, extracted the rice from their gullets, and subsequently planted the grains, thus guaranteeing the Malagasy their staple crop.
- 6 Rapeto, the Vazimba giant who met his death by audaciously trying to seize the moon to please his child (Dahle & Sims 1984:54), demanded of Rasoalao the use of her cattle, for Rasoalao knew the benefits of inundated rice cultivation in fields trampled by cattle. She refused his request. In retaliation, Rapeto used gigantic boulders, still visible and immovable today in the region of Itasy, to dam the rice fields of Rasoalao. The “Beautiful One” had enough (*lao*¹) and decided to move away (*lao monina*²). But Rapeto, love-struck, asked her to marry him, and she consented. After outliving her husband and their children, Rasoalao released her cattle into the wild to become *omby manga*, “*bœufs sauvages sans bosse*” (Abinal & Malzac 1955:462). These wild beasts of renowned beauty

were comparable in their strength and ferocity to the highest ranking *andriana*. Even into the time of Ranavalona I, this queen made intercessions to Rasoalao when she sought these animals for her delight and excitement in the battle of fierce bulls.

- 7 Andriambodilova saw Ranoro, another Vazimba of remarkable beauty, playing among boulders near the place now known as Ambatondranoro. He proposed marriage to her. She warned him that he would not be able to follow all the taboos/*fady* that surrounded her. He reassured her that he would willingly submit to her prohibitions, the principle one of which was not to pronounce the word “*sira*” or “salt.” She consented to the marriage. As might be expected, in the ensuing drama, in an unguarded moment of anger, Andriambodilova used the word, “*sira*.” Ranoro bid him “adieu” and descended/dissolved into a body of water that came to be a source for the water of royal circumcisions. Today, this site is one of pilgrimage and its water remains sacred and efficacious.
- 8 These early females imbued with the power of the primal, the generative, the celestial, and the mystical, eventually gave way in Imerina to two queens, Rangita and Rafohy, who held terrestrial political power and who, according to the *Tantara ny Andriana* (Callet 1981), are said to have founded the Merina dynasty. A quick perusal of the *Tantara* offers a subsequent story, however, wherein a series of male political figures take center stage. It is Andrianampoinimerina whose tale occupies the majority of the pages of the *Tantara*; his tale also holds the attention of other sources of tradition and history. Eventually, the descent into French colonial rule began with Ranavalona I, a female powerful enough to be described by certain of her contemporaries (Raombana 1980, Pfeiffer 1981) as a female Caligula. She was subsequently succeeded by a series of weak queens until the monarchy was deposed by French colonial forces.
- 9 However, let us return to the glory days of Imerina and Andrianampoinimerina. Page after page of the *Tantara* is filled with the words and the exploits of this king. Yet, with a steady and a hard gaze, it is possible to look around and past Andrianampoinimerina and his male predecessors and successors in the *Tantara*, and bring into relief women of power and sensuality; to see women as not only powerful consorts in the “politics of the bedroom” but also in public politics.

Fruits of desire

- 10 To play with oranges, lemons and grapefruits is to become sweet-smelling after the act of consummation (e.g., Paulhan 2007:104). The scent of sage and wild blue onion trampled underfoot, and the taste of sugar cane can pique passion (*ibid.*, pp. 80, 92, 314); yet the scent of anise and ginger do not mix; rather they smell of rivalry (pp. 398). Thick honey from the east and coarse grained salt from the west are a sweet and savory temptation, an invitation to taste delights (p. 82). Even an introductory text in anthropology will point out a relatively universal connection between the consumption of food and sexual acts (Rosman, Rubel & Weisgrau 2009:85-87). For Imerina, the theme of “sensual appetite” is central to the construction of many *hain-teny* (a genre of oral poetry), and this theme has been explored in the works of Paulhan (1938, 1987, 2007) including *Le repas et l’amour chez les Merinas*. There is a “tasty” tale of desire and power in the *Tantara* (Callet 1981:383) concerning the grandfather and grandmother of Andrianampoinimerina (*Firaketana* 1940:53). It illustrates the fact that women were not always pawns in the power plays of men who fathered them or of men who desired them (despite Paulhan’s interpretation to the contrary 1987:56-57). Andriambelomasina, the king’s son (and future grandfather of

Andrianampoinimerina), refused to eat what was put before him, demanding instead the chrysalides of silkworms. Servants were sent in search of this delicacy, yet once found, prepared, and set before Andriambelomasina, he refused the plate. The “subject” of his desire became clear; it was Rasoherina (Madame Chrysalide), the wife of Andriambolanambo, a rival “prince”. Under the pretense of not having rendered visit to the king and his wife in a considerable while, Rasoherina was convoked. Once Rasoherina was in the presence of Andriambelomasina, she reprimanded him demanding to know why she had been summoned despite the fact that she was married to another. Rasoherina was in turn reproached by Andriambelomasina for not having brought the renowned oranges of the village of Namehana, where she resided, in offering to him. She retorted that she had indeed brought his parents, the sovereign and his wife, oranges, but she had set aside for their son the largest most desirable orange, understood to be Rasoherina herself: a *voasary aman-javona* (an orange [to be gathered] among the clouds), a *voasary aman-erika* (an orange [to be gathered] in the fine mist/rain) (Paulhan 1991:174-175)! A woman who is free to choose her destiny, who recognizes her self-worth, is as rare as a *voasary fahavaratra* (an orange [found] in summer) (*ibid.*, pp. 1991:170-171). Andriambelomasina and Rasoherina were married in a consummate act of political power, and their grandson, Andrianampoinimerina, was to become the most renowned sovereign of Madagascar.

- 11 Andrianampoinimerina’s own rise to power included both the conferring of his name by, and an interesting act of intimacy on the part of, his great aunt, Ramorabe, as recounted in the *Tantara* (Callet 1981:406-407). One day, the young Ramboasalatsimarofy³ purchased honey and shrimp to present to his great aunt, Ramorabe, who resided at Ambohidratrimo. He presented himself to the servants of his great aunt, asking to see her. The servants announced the arrival of Ramboasalama, but added that he was dressed in dirty clothes made from raffia (*jabo maloto*). Ramorabe had the shawl and the loincloth (*ny lamba sy salaka*) of her husband given to Ramboasalama to wear (in an interesting act of sensuous intimacy that, in other circumstances, could speak of incest as well as treason) and he was subsequently brought into her presence. She honored him by bestowing a blessing, offering him a seat of honor, and having a goose slaughtered and cooked for his pleasure. It was Ramorabe who, according to certain traditions, gave Ramboasalama the name of Andrianampoinimerina, the “Noble who is ‘Desired’ in the Hearts/Navels of [his subjects] the Merina.” Not only was power passed to Andrianampoinimerina through the female line, from his grandfather, Andriambelomasina, to his mother⁴, but his claim to power was legitimated in an act of blessing by the elder sister of his grandmother.
- 12 Royal marriage to solidify military conquest, to create coalition, and to pacify populations is a strategy far from unique to Malagasy politics. Indeed, Ramamonjisoa has remarked : “*Comme dans toutes les sociétés africaines, le mariage des chefs est avant tout une opération politique*” (1976:132). The *Tantara* uses the image of hair braided into a single tress to explain the role of noble marriages in bringing peace and unity to the polity (Callet 1981:715). When the Betsileo along with their sovereign, Andriantsileondrafy, submitted to Andrianampoinimerina and the Merina, Hagamainty, the sagacious counselor of Andrianampoinimerina, explicitly advised him: “If you do not take a young woman, then the country will not obey”⁵ (*ibid.*, p. 1001). Andrianampoinimerina thus took Raketamena, the daughter of Andriantsileondrafy, as one of his many wives.

- 13 Andrianampoinimerina was to follow an aggressive strategy of political marriage to complement his vigorous strategy of the unification of Imerina through warfare, and social and economic reform. Many of those women taken as wives were political pawns and sexual conquests, yet a number of the royal wives were accorded important roles as they were assigned to occupy the twelve sacred mountains of Imerina. The *Tantara* offers the poetic image of Andrianampoinimerina standing at the center of the land sending these wives to the four corners of Imerina; they were to be the “silk threads” that he himself would hold and use to weave the unity of the polity (*ibid.*, p. 715). From those heights they received offerings (e.g., *sorona* or sacrificial animals, *omby malaza* or cattle of remarkable beauty and size) destined for the unique sovereign, Andrianampoinimerina, and exercised power as administrators.
- 14 One “queen” in particular, Rafotsiramiangaly, exercised influence well beyond the reign of Andrianampoinimerina, which ended in 1810. She was inherited as wife by the son of Andrianampoinimerina, Radama I, upon the former’s death and she outlived that second husband who died in 1828. According to the *Tantara*, it was she that received the sacrifice of the *omby malaza* (*ibid.*, p. 166). She is also said to have always presided over the New Year/Royal Bath ceremonies (*fandroana*) and the sacrifice of the *omby volavita* (cattle with speckled coats considered appropriate offering to nobility) at Ambohimanga because she exercised the “right of the eldest” (*mitondra hazokiana*) (*ibid.*, p. 599). Indeed, her residence at the capital of Antananarivo was called Tsarazoky or “To be graced by the presence of the elder.”
- 15 Both Andrianampoinimerina and Ramiangaly were descended from Andriambelomasina. Ramiangaly’s father was the son of the sister of Andriambelomasina, which placed him as contender and legitimate inheritor of power as it passed from brother to sister’s son. Andrianampoinimerina, it will be remembered, was descended from the daughter of Andriambelomasina, which also gave him claim to power. Ramiangaly exercised her “right of the eldest” until the end of her days⁶.
- 16 By birth, Ramiangaly was destined to be either a pawn of power or a power player. Her father, Andriankotonavalona, was not only a critical inheritor of power (as explained above), but also a *detainer* of power as the head of the important *menakely* (feudal estate) of Ambohipoloalina and an able-bodied warrior within Andrianampoinimerina’s ranks. Miangaly, as a clever and intelligent woman, became a powerful political player. However, according to popular tales, she was also a sensuous woman, “desired” by Andrianampoinimerina.

Miangaly no manina re!

- 17 Miangaly, tradition has it, lived on a high mountain (Ambohipoloalina) covered in forest and mist. Being so beautiful, she excited passion. Andrianampoinimerina, desiring her, took her for wife. However, the “Capricious One” taunted the “Desired One” by constantly seeking excuses to return to the home of her parents, like a bird that swoops down to lightly touch the water’s surface and then only to fly away again (“*Manifi-drano ny ngita, misai-mandro, ravorona*”) (Ramalagasy 1961:29). One day, in the early morning light sitting at Ambatomiarendro, where he often came to play the game of *fanorona* at the town of Ambohimanga, Andrianampoinimerina turned his gaze to the west and sighed: “How I long for Miangaly” (“*Manina an’i Miangaly aho izany*”). Hagamainty, the wise and faithful

counselor of the sovereign, recognized that sex and love can mix badly with politics. Hagamainty replied: “No, my Lord, it is Miangaly that longs for you!” (“*I Miangaly no manina re!*”). Andrianampoinimerina recognized his counselor’s wisdom: the paramount sovereign of the land should rule with his mind and not be captive to his emotions. Coming to his “senses”, he commissioned his musicians to compose the song *I Miangaly no manina*.

- 18 The term “*miangaly*” took on a new meaning: to have a talent for singing or playing songs of a melancholy or plaintive nature. The song *I Miangaly no manina* is said to have been a favorite of Andrianampoinimerina. The story continues to inspire. Consider the quality of the verse below in a version written over 150 years later (Ramalagasy 1961:29):

<i>Andrianampoinimerina: ‘lay olon-tsy niontsina</i>	Andrianampoinimerina: the intrepid one
<i>Ho vato tsy lovin’ny fitiavam-bady</i>	Like a rock, untouched by love
<i>Ka nikabary sy efa nibotsina,</i>	Claiming with pride his steadfastness
<i>Indrisy! Fa ‘manina’ lavo sahadry</i>	Alas! So soon a victim of melancholy.
<i>Sangim-pitiavan-dRamiangaly</i>	The teasing ways of Miangaly are
<i>Singan-kofehy mahalavo ny omby</i>	The single stand of rope that brings the bull to its knees.
<i>Nahita ity ‘hanina’ jeren-tsy mahomby</i>	And seeing this unrequited love
<i>Ka i Hagamainty no avy namaly</i>	Hagamainty pronounced
<i>Miangaly no manina, fa tsy ny Mpanjaka!</i>	It is Miangaly that is love-struck not the Sovereign.
<i>Nahatsiaro tena ny Tompon’ny Merina</i>	And the Master of the Merina came to his senses
<i>Koa ny fahendrena izay nampivanaka</i>	And his astounding wisdom
<i>Dia zary ohabolona manerinerina</i>	Became a matter of legend.

The enduring tale of Miangaly

- 19 Even today, almost two centuries later, one can still find the tale of Miangaly and Andrianampoinimerina in song, not only performed but also recorded on CDs. What appears below is a slightly reworked version of the supposed original verse, still poignant to contemporary ears:

<i>E ! E ! Eny. Re e!</i>	E ! E ! Eny. Re e!
<i>I Miangaly ry zareo no manina ô!</i>	Listen, all, it is Miangaly that is longing!

<i>I Miangaly re, i Miangaly re.</i>	Oh, Miangaly, Miangaly!
<i>I Miangaly ry zareo</i>	Oh, Miangaly!
<i>Re no manina ô!</i>	I long for you.
<i>Fa Andringitra ka saro-javatra (2)</i>	Andringitra is so capricious.
<i>Miangaly re! (2)</i>	Oh, Miangaly!
<i>Tsy Andringitra no saro-javatra (2)</i>	Andringitra is not so capricious
<i>Fa ianao re no tia katsakatsaka</i>	But it is you who are wandering [lost]
<i>Miangaly re (2)</i>	Oh Miangaly!
<i>Fendronfendro</i>	On the verge go tears.
<i>Fendronfendron'Ambatomiantendro ô !</i>	Ambatomiantendro is about to cry.
<i>Aoka re! Aoka re!</i>	Oh, please stop, please.
<i>Sy ny ranomason'Ankaratra iry e!</i>	And the tears of that Ankaratra!
<i>Aoka re! Aoka re!</i>	Please stop, please!
<i>Maniry ny mba te hihaona lahy!</i>	I desire to be with you!
<i>Aoka re! Aoka re!</i>	Please, stop, please!
<i>Fanajana ny didin'ny hafa re!</i>	Remember, there are other obligations you must honor.
<i>Ka ho aiza?</i>	Where am I to go?
<i>Ka misento, ka misentosento ny fo mahatsiahy!</i>	I sigh, my heart's remembering makes [me cry out!]
<i>Miangaly, Miangaly re!</i>	Miangaly, oh Miangaly!
<i>Fa ny maso mahiratra ihany. Miangaly e!</i>	But I see clearly below. Oh, Miangaly!
<i>Ao ambany ny rahona irony e! Miangaly e!</i>	Below the mists over there. Oh, [Miangaly!]
<i>Mandainga izay tsy ho manina ô.</i>	I lie if I say I so not long for you.
<i>E Miangaly ô !</i>	Oh Miangaly!
<i>Ka i Miangaly zareo no manina ô!</i>	Listen, all, it is Miangaly that longs [for me.

- 20 Musicians who have performed and perform the song (e.g., Sylvestre Randafison, Ny Antsaly) have been and are aware of the historical reference to Andrianampoinimerina and Ramiangaly. Yet, for many contemporary Malagasy, the song speaks not of specific historical figures, but rather of situations where one must choose between personal desires, on the one hand, and personal and moral obligations, on the other. To fully appreciate the power of the original verse in its historic context, and even the power of the contemporary verse in its contemporary context, it is important to understand that the various versions of the song *I Miangaly no manina* are grounded in a tradition of oral verse and, more specifically, grounded in the tradition of the *hain-teny*.
- 21 Rakotonaivo (1990:9) said of the Merina verse *hain-teny* that to listen to *hain-teny* is to have the “ears charmed,” “the spirit given pleasure,” and the “heart moved.” Those of us from highly literate cultures must come to appreciate the fact that literacy can deafen our ears, jade our spirits, and render our “heartfelt” spoken words prosaic. There is much contemporary literature that explores the contrasts between the styles of oral knowledge and the styles of literate knowing (e.g., Ong 1982, Goody 1988). In a primarily oral society, we are dealing with sophisticated producers and consumers of systems of local knowledge that are philosophically rich and provocative. More importantly, we are dealing with sophisticated consumers of oral discourse that is linguistically subtle and symbolically dense.
- 22 How fascinating then is it that, for 19th century Madagascar, we have a Malagasy child taken from his birthright world of orality and placed, as a political pawn, into the literate world of his culture’s would-be colonizers. Raombana and his twin brother, Rahaniraka, born in 1809, were sent to England in 1820, by the son of Andrianampoinimerina who inherited the throne. In addition to learning industrial arts, the intent was for them to become linguistic mediators and cultural brokers. Raombana and his brother did come back to Madagascar (in 1829) at the age of approximately 20 and were recruited to serve as secretaries to Queen Ranaivalona I, the daughter-in-law of Andrianampoinimerina, who took over the throne from her husband. The brothers came back oriented in the fashion of the West, but alienated from their native language and cultural logic. Raombana was a descendent of nobles of the south of Imerina, displaced in power and prestige by those of the north; in his history of Madagascar, he continually referred to Andrianampoinimerina as “the usurper” (1980). However, he also recognized, not only that this usurper was a “wily orator” (1980:178-179), but that the Merina people were eloquent orators as well (1980:34-35):
- But what struck me most was their retentive memory and the persuasive Eloquence which every Hova [Merina] people seem to possess from the old men to the mere children that plays and romp about the streets, and in the public assembly or Kabary, they display their Eloquence in the highest degree. They speak without pre-meditation, and have a great flow of words, and no confusions are at all perceived in
- The people of Imerina are such eloquent speakers that some persons who has injustice [sic] even on their sides win the Law-suits merely on account of the Eloquence which they had displayed, and from which eloquence, it appeared to the judges and the sovereigns, that their statements are true, and therefore decided the Law suits in their favor.
- 23 Additionally, a number of foreigners came to appreciate the oral skills of the Malagasy. Vig (2002:26) remarked : “Le goût des Malgaches pour les bonnes histoires était en effet tel qu’ils avaient élevé la manière de les raconter au rang d’un art.” A century after

Raombana's remarks, Paulhan, in his studies of *hain-teny* (2007, 1991, 1938), came to appreciate the power of oral verse to persuade, to dissuade and to incite the imagination. Paulhan's work (1938) allows us to appreciate how supposedly intimate themes of desire, consent, refusal, hesitation, rival lovers, fidelity, separation, abandonment, regrets and reproaches can be used to not only discuss private matters, but can be used to contest and reflect upon public and political matters. A roofer and a client who do not agree on a price, neighbors who do not agree on the boundaries of an agricultural field, a traditional healer and a discontented client who argue about fees, and even young boys guarding cattle who dispute the rules of the game they play with grasshoppers to pass the time, their disputes find expression in *hain-teny* (Paulhan 1938:27). Paulhan talked of *clair-obscur* (*chiaroscuro*) as a way for the non-Malagasy and the "lettered" Malagasy to approach the subtle appreciation of such verse. For the original intended audience of *hain-teny*, Paulhan is somewhat "beside the point." The song/tale of Ramiangaly, for its intended audience, was powerful political/private propaganda within the tradition of *hain-teny*. Who could not but desire a sovereign who cherished equality above all else, and who set aside personal desire and sentiment to treat all subjects as equal, "riddling" a whole hosts of self-interested rivals to power?

- 24 A powerful and poetic tale of love and sensuality interlaced with beauty and prowess can capture the imagination and foster sympathy. A sovereign with two hearts attentive to the needs of his subjects, disregarding his own "desires," can garner the love and loyalty of his subjects. Yet, ultimate political power corrupts, and ultimately a bull of stunning wild beauty with "horns of copper" (*tandro-barahina*) and "piercing" (*manavaka*) (Paulhan 1991:100-101) large eyes (*Ombalahibemaso*) is a savage brutal force to be reckoned with.
- 25 Women who live in hierarchically and state organized societies know well how sex and the private become political. If one was of high rank, one could become an agent of alliance and pacification. One could also powerfully wield one's desirability for individual gain. Miangaly, the subject of supreme desire, continued to be a force to reckon with well beyond the days of her powerful paramour as we have noted above. Very few were the Malagasy queens who tested their powers of descent, intellect and persuasion as did Miangaly (and Rambolamasoandro). At one point, Andrianampoinimerina was informed by the slaves of Miangaly that she had betrayed his bed. Andrianampoinimerina's former object of desire was subsequently sentenced to death. Upon hearing of this sentence, her father, Andriankotonavalona, a "brave noble" who had performed important services for Andrianampoinimerina (Raombana 1980:234-235), tearfully beseeched Andrianampoinimerina to allow his daughter to be put to the test of *tangena*, a poison ordeal. Andriankotonavalona's request was granted. To Andrianampoinimerina's "astonishment", Miangaly was proven innocent (*ibid.*) as she lived through the ordeal. She also lived to be a powerful doyenne well beyond the years of the bull she brought down with a single strand.
- 26 As a woman of lesser rank, one could become an "object" of desire, of acquisition, of exchange. Fifty beautiful women slaves were used to purchase canons for Andrianampoinimerina's military campaigns, according to Raombana (*ibid.*, pp. 218-223). One could also become a victim of the political logic that would treat love and sexual passion as political treason; for "wives of the sovereigns to lay with men is death by the Malagasy Law" (*ibid.*, p. 205). Andrianampoinimerina was said to have "treated his wives in the most brutal manner, for He but very seldom lays with the most part of them; and on the mere suspicion of any of them being unfaithful to His bed, He orders them to be killed" (Raombana

- 1980:232-233). If the wife was a commoner, the spear would do the job; if a noble, drowning would avoid the spilling of blood (*ibid.*).
- 27 The tradition of Miangaly is powerful and moving even today as preserved in tale and song. Yet, popular tradition preserves other moments of Andrianampoinimerina's life and reign.
- 28 There also exists the story of "The Lady of Vakinisisaony," one of the many wives of Andrianampoinimerina, "who possessed the most charming beauty, and who joined with the above Charms, had a most lively wit which made her be respected and beloved by all those who knew her" (*ibid.*, pp. 234-235). Her only living family was her brother, whom she cherished. Her brother was of equal "countenance and manner" (*ibid.*) as she herself, and thus he was desired by many women. One day, having arranged a liaison with an innamorata, he asked his sister to exchange her *lamba*/silk cloak for his, which was dirty. His loving sister complied (*ibid.*, pp. 236-237). The calculated offering of a husband's *salaka*/loincloth from a great aunt to a grand nephew was a powerful and metaphoric act of recognition of destiny and sovereignty. The loving exchange of a cloak between a sister and a brother was viewed by the grand nephew as a metaphor for incest. Loudly and brutally denounced by Andrianampoinimerina, the "Lady of Vakinisisaony" and her brother were accused of treason and executed upon his "order" (*manao teniko fe andriana*/actualize my words for I am sovereign) (Houlder & Noyer 1960:117). Andrianampoinimerina further ordered that their naked bodies be placed in a position of unspeakable vulgarity (*ampifamoterina*) and left to be devoured by dogs, insects and birds (Raombana 1980:236-237).
- 29 *Aleo halan'andriana toy izay halam-bahoaka* (Houlder & Noyer 1960:116). One is left to wonder: is it indeed better to be beloved by the people than by the sovereign?

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NOTES

1. "Lào, adj[ectif]. et p[articipe]. Qui s'enfuit par dégoût, qui n'en veut plus" (Abinal & Malzac 1955:387).
2. "Lao mònina. Qui est dégoûté du lieu où réside et se transporte ailleurs" (*ibid.*).
3. "Vigorous/healthy Dog": the childhood name of Andrianampoinimerina.
4. Though an alternative argument posits that it was through his grandmother, Rasoharina (Levi-Strauss 1985:82).
5. Loose translation of "Raha tsy aka'anao zazavavy io, tsy mety hendry ny tany eo".
6. According to a recent newspaper article (Gilbert 2004) about the village of Ambohipoloalina, Ramiangaly's natal village, she died on July 17, 1879. According to the *Tantara*, she lived until 1881 (Callet 1981:720). In either case, she lived to an age well beyond 100 years old.

ABSTRACTS

At first sight, tales about the relation between Andrianampoinimerina (political reign 1787-1810) and Miangaly, a young woman of high noble status, talk about love. In fact, their love tale was originally crafted as political propaganda. One of these tales tells that the sovereign disregarded his own sensual desires in order to emphasize the state ideology of a sovereign attentive to all his subjects. Such tales of popular history, political propaganda and subversive histories allow us to appreciate how the private is rendered political when the power of love and the love of power mix within the highest ranks of state elite.

A priori, les récits sur la relation entre le roi Andrianampoinimerina (1787-1810) et Miangaly, une jeune femme de la haute noblesse, immortalisés et transmis jusqu'à nous par l'intermédiaire du savoir imaginaire populaire, évoquent l'amour. En fait, à l'origine, leur histoire relevait d'une propagande politique. Un de ces récits rapporte que le roi dut renoncer à son propre élan amoureux pour pouvoir mettre en avant l'idéologie de l'Etat. Ce genre de récits populaires à thème historique nous permet de saisir le glissement de la sphère privée vers le politique quand le pouvoir de l'amour et l'amour du pouvoir s'entremêlent au sein des élites de l'Etat.

INDEX

Mots-clés: art oral, féminisme et rang social, idéologie de l'État, privé / politique, propagande politique, reines de Madagascar

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